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SUBJECT: UAE HOSTS UN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN
ASSISTANCE DONORS CONFERENCE

1. Summary. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Sweden co-hosted a meeting in Abu Dhabi on 9 May to discuss coordination of international humanitarian assistance. The meeting was part of an evolving campaign to engage emerging donors in humanitarian response activities. Each the participating countries provided short presentations on their humanitarian assistance strategies, and common themes included the need for improved coordination of the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and the desire of emerging donors to be included during the planning stages for humanitarian operations. End Summary.

2. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Sweden - in its capacity as chair of the Donor Support Group for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) - co-hosted a meeting in Abu Dhabi on 9 May to discuss coordination of international humanitarian assistance. The meeting was initiated by the OCHA Donor Support Group and OCHA. Mrs. Sana'a Darwish Al Kitby, Secretary-General of the UAE Red Crescent Society chaired on

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behalf of the UAE. In addition to the two chair countries, participants came from Canada, Egypt, India, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, South Africa Switzerland, the US and UN OCHA. South Korea was also invited but was unable to attend. The US was represented by Bill Garvelink, acting Assistant Administrator for USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs and US Mission Geneva AIDREP.

3. OCHA made short presentations to the group on the status of several structures and tools created by the UN to facilitate humanitarian action. These include: The Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP); the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC); the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams (UNDAC); and the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG). OCHA also focused on the importance of "broadening partnerships" to improve the predictability of funding for humanitarian operations; to augment stand-by arrangements and to increase the number of protection staff in the field. OCHA touched on the issues of integrated UN missions, civil-military relations in peace-keeping operations; internally displaced persons and refugees; and transition programming in post-conflict situations.

4. All of the participating countries provided short presentations on their humanitarian assistance strategies, focusing on their roles as donors, as advocates and as operational partners. The group underscored the importance of maintaining humanitarian principles when providing assistance, and recognized the different strengths among various donors that would lead to differing ways of contributing. "Partnership" did not imply "sameness." The goal was to build a global system that would ensure a coherent overall approach and an effective and timely response.

5. Presentations and comments made by the emerging donors (UAE, India, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and South Africa) reflected three general goals:

- Improve coordination in the delivery of humanitarian assistance;
- Include emerging donors during the planning for humanitarian operations;
- Build national and regional capacities.

6. The three Gulf states in particular were critical of what they saw as an absence of coordination. Kuwait raised concerns that aid was often late or inappropriate, noting the abundance of "unneeded" relief supplies that arrived in the aftermath of the earthquake in Gujarat, India. Saudi Arabia highlighted problems among the main donors, among the key humanitarian agencies, and between NGOs and governments. All three states identified coordination as vital for an effective international response.

7. Several of the emerging donors had taken steps within their own governments to centralize humanitarian response. In Kuwait, the Kuwaiti Fund for Economic Development finances most

humanitarian activities during the emergency as well as recovery phases. In Saudi Arabia, which was represented at the meeting by its Ministry of Finance, coordination of humanitarian aid falls under a Coordinating Committee within the government. According to the Saudi representative, the government prefers to provide assistance "under one umbrella" - usually the Saudi Red Crescent Society, to avoid the possibility of funding duplicate activities with several partners. The Red Crescent Societies in the UAE and Egypt also play central roles in administering humanitarian assistance provided by the governments.

18. The emerging donors also stressed the need to engage them early in the planning process. The UAE commented that the Gulf states were not included at the outset in discussions about humanitarian operations which engendered problems for all of them in coordinating their responses. Saudi Arabia said that it sought to respond to all UN appeals, but often had difficulty getting access to information about the crisis or what was needed. Egypt added that small donors also have a role to play in defining humanitarian policies, and India called for "more meaningful inter-governmental oversight" of UN humanitarian assistance programs.

19. The emerging donors struck a common chord in favor of building local and regional capacities. All agreed that the primary responsibility for responding to disasters fell to the government of the affected country. The UAE said that the goal of international assistance should be to build the capacities of affected countries through training and technology transfers. Egypt echoed this goal, noting that it had a lot to offer in both areas. South Africa said that it is being called upon increasingly to play a greater role internationally and regionally in disaster response, especially for slow-onset disasters that affect large parts of Africa. Given that relief operations depend upon transportation links, South Africa and the UAE argued that it was both cost-effective and logical to develop regional hubs in affected areas.

110. Participants agreed that the Abu Dhabi meeting was a welcome step toward improved sharing of information and coordination. The UAE requested that OCHA take steps to "accelerate" the partnership initiative by sharing information more broadly and identifying concrete proposals for the group to take forward. Issues that the group might pursue include:

- Improved reporting of funding to OCHA statistical reporting system;
- Participation in and training for the UNDAC teams;
- Exchange of information within the group on monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian programs;
- Exchange of information on activities and advocacy in specific crises;
- Dialog on operational logistics, such as transport of commodities and personnel;
- Advocacy on issues concerning international humanitarian law, such as the protection and safety of humanitarian workers.

111. USAID COMMENT: This initial meeting was a constructive step forward in building a dialog between the major Western donors and emerging donors. The interest shown by the UAE in particular in hosting the meeting and in seeking to identify concrete areas for future collaboration indicates their desire to engage more proactively with the larger donor community. We look forward to working with the Swedes and OCHA as well as U.S. Embassy Abu Dhabi in furthering this initiative to broaden the partnership with emerging donors. END COMMENT.

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